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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 000154

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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AND HRR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [KISL](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: REPORTED DEATH THREAT AGAINST MP OPPOSING GENDER
SEGREGATION IN SCHOOLS

REF: A. KUWAIT 0090
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 0043

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Alan G. Misenheimer for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On February 5, liberal MP Ali Al-Rashed submitted an amendment to Parliament to eliminate the gender segregation requirement in private universities. The bill follows a recently brokered deal between the GOK and Islamist MPs to enforce long-neglected gender segregation legislation (ref A). In response, Al-Rashed has said he received a death threat - unusual in Kuwait - from an unidentified caller who claimed that the bill "is not in line with Kuwait's Islamic traditions." Islamist MPs were quick to condemn the threat.
END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) On February 5, liberal MP Ali Al-Rashed submitted a bill on behalf of the pro-government National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to amend existing legislation requiring gender segregation in Kuwaiti universities. Specifically, the bill would amend a 1996 law requiring segregation at Kuwait University and the Public Authority for Applied Education (PAAET), as well as a 2000 law requiring the same at private universities. While Kuwait University and PAAET are currently gender-segregated, the private universities are not. Since its passage, a series of liberal Education Ministers have taken no steps to enforce this legislation. Nevertheless, Islamists tend to dominate the ranks of the Ministry of Education, and this has long been a bone of contention between them and the GOK.

[1](#)3. (C) In January, Islamist MP Saad Al-Shraye grilled (publicly questioned) Education Minister Nouriyah Al-Sabeeh in an attempt to remove her from office. During the grilling, Al-Shraye raised the topic of ineffective gender segregation in Kuwaiti primary schools. While Minister Al-Sabeeh acquitted herself well during the grilling, Parliament nevertheless moved for a motion of no-confidence (ref B). In response, the GOK brokered a deal with Islamist MPs to support Al-Sabeeh in exchange for enforcement of the 2000 law requiring gender segregation in private universities (ref A). Islamist MPs are reportedly considering a bill to expand this segregation requirement to primary and secondary schools as well.

[1](#)4. (U) Defending the bill, Al-Rashed said the two segregation laws have had serious negative consequences on university students and have created unnecessary expenses for the universities. He also said that sharia does not expressly prohibit mixing of the sexes. Al-Rashed appears to have submitted the bill on behalf of liberal constituents to challenge the well-organized and politically savvy Islamists.

[1](#)5. (U) After presenting the amendment, Al-Rashed said he

received a call from someone who threatened to shoot and kill him if he did not withdraw it. The caller said the amendment was "not in line with Kuwait's Islamic traditions." Al-Rashed reported the incident to the Ministry of Interior, which is investigating. Islamist MPs were quick to condemn the threat, which as received broad attention in Kuwaiti media, and instead called for conflict resolution through the democratic process.

Comment

¶6. (C) Extremist death threats are unusual in Kuwait, and pro-government MP Al-Rashed has put Islamist MPs on the defensive by playing up the issue publicly. The GOK-brokered deal to save liberal Education Minister Nouriyah Al-Sabeeh has raised the gender segregation issue to the forefront of national attention, and MPs on both sides of the argument seem prepared for a protracted fight. END COMMENT.

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MISENHEIMER